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[Easy to Use Robotic Software Tries to Beat Microsoft](#)

A French company offers a free download trial version

The word robot can refer to both physical robots and virtual software agents, but the latter are often referred to as bots. Robots have been part of human imagination for longer than you think. Though modern science-fiction literary genre has made them so famous, that they've become universal brands, like "Robocop", "Terminator", "Data", "R2-D2" or "iRobot", they have been present in mythology long before. The idea of artificial people dates at least as far back as the ancient legend of Cadmus, who sowed dragon teeth that turned into soldiers, and the myth of Pygmalion, whose statue of Galatea came to life. In Greek mythology, the deformed god of metalwork (Vulcan or Hephaestus) created mechanical servants, ranging from intelligent, golden handmaidens to more utilitarian three-legged tables that could move about under their own power. Robotic software is just what a French company named Gostai is developing: simple, easy-to-use robot software that can work with all operating systems. While the idea of having robots to handle mundane tasks may seem the stuff of science fiction to many people, certain countries are already taking the technology very seriously. That's the case in Japan, where the aging of the population has become a concern. South Korea has announced its intention to have robots in households in 2010. So, their idea comes just in the nick of time, since they expect the global market for domestic robots to begin booming in the coming years. As a spectacular marketing strategy, the company has offered free, downloadable versions of its software, called Urbi, that allows robots from Danish toy giant Lego to be programmed. It has also sold the software to 25 universities worldwide for use in robotics research. "We want to do the same thing Microsoft did with its Windows software for personal computing," said Jean-Christophe Baillie, founder of Gostai. He considers Microsoft its main competitor in the robot software business. But the startup, which currently has eight employees, says it has a strategy. It has worked to make the software as simple as possible, which gives it an advantage over the Microsoft version, or so it says. Gostai also says its product's versatility gives it a boost, since Microsoft's software is intended to be used with Windows. The next challenge for the company is to find financing. Convincing investors won't be easy, and Baillie says they ask about competition from Microsoft. "We have to grow very quickly because we have large ambitions: to have Urbi in all robots," said Baillie, 32. "When a platform emerges, people are going to begin developing applications and the phenomenon will take care of itself." To demonstrate their abilities, they tested the software with a Sony robot dog, which he said had been programmed over the course of a weekend. The dog moved to the rhythm of music from French group Daft Punk. Surprisingly, the code to program the robot's head to follow a bouncing ball is only three lines long!